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Planning Commission Study Session

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

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MEETING DATE: NOVEMBER 5, 2014

SUBJECT: GP14-02: SANTAN CHARACTER AREA UPDATE

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE:	Community Livability
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RECOMMENDED MOTION

A. NO MOTION REQUESTED

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

History

<i>Date</i>	<i>Action</i>
April 16, 2014	Town of Gilbert held the 1 st Open House for the Santan Character Area update.
May 14, 2014	Town of Gilbert held the 2 nd Open House for the Santan Character Area update.
June 4, 2014	Planning Commission Study Session for GP14-02 Santan Character Area

Overview

The General Plan is the vision of where and how the city should grow. It is adopted by resolution and approved by the voters every 10 years. The General Plan contains the Town policies that guide the development of the community such as the mix of land uses, character, design, land use, open space, natural environment, community service, neighborhood revitalization, transportation and economic growth. It sets forth the physical form of the Town in the Land Use

Map. It does not change the zoning for property; however, a change in zoning must be consistent with the General Plan.

The General Plan is used by the Town Council and the Planning Commission as a guide to evaluate policy changes and budget decisions. It is used by staff to evaluate building and development in order to make recommendations. It is used by the public as a long range guide to the community. The plan provides the basis for the Town's long-range plans and proposals for different geographic area. Character Area policies are crafted for specific areas of the Town that have a distinct vision, goal or feature. The Town has four Character Areas within the General Plan of which the Santan Character Area is one.

The Santan Character Area (SCA) encompasses 10,309 (TOG GIS) acres. A Specific Area Plan was created in 1998 when Gilbert's planning area increased with this territory. After many open house meeting and hearings, the Character Area was created and served as the tool to recognized the importance of the rural agricultural heritage of south Gilbert. Over time, the once predominantly agricultural area has seen the construction of master planned communities, the development of 84 miles of new collector and arterial roads, 20 traffic signals and over 100 new businesses and restaurants. Service oriented in-fill development is just beginning to respond the SCA population growth. Several schools, churches and residential rooftops are now dominant in the area. There is still significant interest from the development community to continue residential construction in the SCA.

Update Process and Analysis

The 2014 evaluation and update objective was to reach out to the SCA community and hear from the residents, the business owners and the land owners regarding their vision for the future and the development of the remaining lands. Because the range of interests is so diverse within this large area, public open houses were used as a form of outreach. An open house invitation mailing was sent to over 10,000 property owners and businesses within the SCA boundary. The open and transparent process engaged the community and encouraged communication.

During the first open houses, soft data such as personal stories, community visioning, and emotions were collected from those that attended. It quickly became apparent during the open house what was valued by those that attended. "Live, Work and Play" word clouds were created documenting the key terms used by the community during the first open house. The larger the term in the cloud, the more often that term was used by the public. "Live" was represented by words such as open space, rural, large lots, shopping, views and farmers markets were all desired land uses or design parameters. Descriptive words such as quiet, non-hectic, low light, low density, interaction and openness were commonly used. "Play" was clearly expressed by the need for parks, recreation centers and trails. The SCA community wants to play, and is clearly looking for new and varied opportunities. The community expressed "Work" in a variety of words such as: the need for better local and regional circulation, the need for high tech jobs within the East Valley, and the need for support amenities.

Staff reviewed the community input for SCA strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This analysis is known as SWOT. The SCA community members in attendance recognized the strength of the community as a clean, quiet, low density, rural lifestyle. The weakness identified

was the lack of parks and service amenities to support the existing population. The opportunities noted were available land for park and commercial development. The community expressed that they would like the General Plan Land Use Classifications to remain as they are currently depicted. Therefore, the perceived threats to the SCA are General Plan map amendments requesting a different land use. These topics were reaffirmed during the second open house. The second open house also reviewed hard data such as mapping and discussed the statistics and analysis that yet needed to be gathered and analyzed.

Data Collection

History and Culture

The history of the Santan Charater Area is strongly rooted in farming and the dairy industry. At one time there were over 8 dairies in the SCA area. Today there are three dairies. The agricultural acres have diminished from 6,385 acres to less than 1,800 acres of active cultivation. Of the 10,309 (TOG GIS) acres within the SCA, there is less than 3,138 (TOG GIS) acres of undeveloped vacant land remaining. Many residents in the SCA area remember the open irrigation canals, huge fields, wildlife and crop dusters fondly. The culture of the area was live and let live. Though neighbors were often spread apart, they all knew each other and came to each other's aid in times of crisis. The SCA was a place where children walked on farm roads to visit friends, residents road horses along canals and the opening day of dove season was an event. The SCA was a family oriented environment with the community at large keeping watch over the land and each other.

Architecture and Urban Form

The architecture and urban form within the SCA was predominantly mid-20th century ranch houses on large plots of land. The dirt farm roads served as fields and homestead access. As time progressed, lot splits, minor land divisions and rural subdivision of one, two and five acre farm lots in small neighborhoods occurred. Most of the lots still embraced farm animals and pastures even as the homes grew larger and more elaborate. Some of these neighborhoods grew to be larger neighborhoods such as the rural residential area between Val Vista Drive and Greenfield Road, from Queen Creek Road to Chandler Heights Boulevard. The density of rural neighborhoods is approximately 1.8 (TOG GIS) and is almost completely built-out baring additional lot splits and the commercial corners at the major intersections. Rural residential lands > 0 – 2 equal approximately 14.16% (TOG GIS) of land use within the SCA.

In the late 1990s, the custom homes constructed on the farm lots became larger and more elaborated with improved roads and utilities. As the construction boom continued, larger master plan subdivision began developing within the SCA. The master planned communities tended to have smaller lots in the 6,000 sf to 10,000 sf range with an average density of > 2-5 dwelling units per acre. The architecture of the tract homes was contemporary with touches of architectural styles reminiscent of Italian, Spanish, Mission, Craftsman and Prairie. The roads were paved with curb, gutter and were often curvilinear and punctuated with cul-de-sacs. The major master planned communities and subdivisions equal approximately 2,437 (Layton Lakes, Freeman Farms, Shamrock Estates, Seville) acres within the SCA. The SCA is now an area full of urban amenities that also embraces it's historical past.

Residential Market Potential

The residential housing market remains strong within Gilbert. In 2013 Gilbert was the No. 1 municipality for residential building permits in the State of Arizona. The building community is actively seeking vacant land on which to construct tract subdivisions creating a seller's market. Some of the dairymen and farmers are open to the sale of their property to developers. Others wish to continue their family business regardless of the market potential. During the open house meeting, the public did indicate that the current General Plan Land Use Classifications were acceptable and encouraged the new communities to embrace the agricultural past and character through fencing, architecture, landscape, trails and open space. The public is essentially seeking modern conveniences within developments that retain a small town feel.

Commercial Market Potential

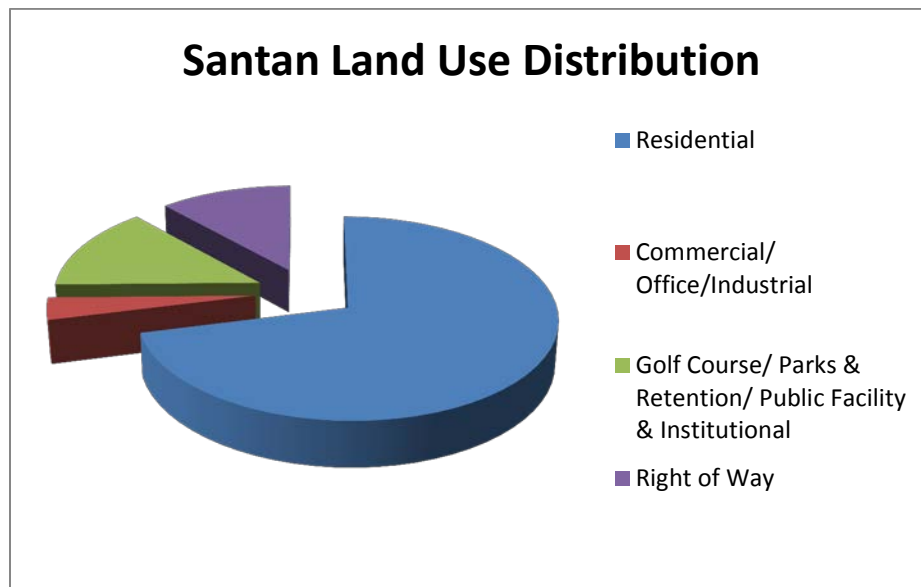
The Commercial Market for the SCA is supported by the 34,000 (MAG/Census) residents within the boundary and an additional 77,500 (MAG/Census) residents on the 3 mile periphery (Chandler, Mesa, Queen Creek, the Gila Indian Reservation and County lands). Based on citizen input, there remains a significant need for neighborhood services such as restaurants, print shops, salons, automotive repair, day care, medical offices, grocery stores, dry cleaners, fast food, and other uses that support daily life. Other non-retail services needing land use designated for non-residential uses are not known at this time. These uses could include schools, churches, health services, etc. The commercial corner of Higley and Riggs was envisioned to develop as a village center, providing a commercial hub of mixed uses for the South Gilbert Community.

The retail markets for a Santan parcel were recently analyzed by an applicant as part of a Major General Plan Amendment that was ultimately denied by the Town Council. The summary of the market analysis (dated Oct 2013) stated that the Higley and Riggs Road parcel under consideration did not generally contain the density of development to support a retail "power center", now or in the future. Since this report, staff has reviewed retail trade area maps for a range of commercial development types. These maps show that while a larger retail "power center" may not be supported; there are gaps in smaller retail trade centers needed to serve existing and future neighborhoods. Additionally, other non-residential land uses are necessary to serve the diverse Santan area such as health care facilities, colleges, congregate living facilities, eating and drinking establishments, cultural institutions, etc.

Staff also reviewed the distribution of land uses in neighboring cities. The tables below compares the Santan Area's land uses to the entire Town of Gilbert. The Commercial/ Office/ Industrial uses in the SCA consume only 3.61% compared to 15% for Gilbert town wide. In comparison to Raleigh, NC who also experienced a growth boom during 1980-2000 by doubling their population from 150,000 to 370,000, show a land use mix for 140 square miles to be: 43% residential, 10.7% Commercial/Office/Industrial, 22% Golf/Parks/Institutional, 26.8% roads/vacant/other. Gilbert's review of proposed land use changes for the SCA has been careful when the loss of non-residential land uses are proposed. The growing Senior and Millennium populations tend to prefer mixed use development with convenient amenities. Most of the commercial land use classifications in the SCA offer this option.

Non-Residential Land Use Comparisons

General Plan Land Use Classification	Santan Character Area DEVELOPED		Santan Character Area VACANT		Santan Character Area TOTALS		Town Wide
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent	Percent
Residential	4,470.86	43.37	2,858.53	27.73	7,329.39	71.10	58.08
Commercial/ Office/Industrial	110.64	1.07	261.03	2.54	371.67	3.61	14.99
Golf Course/ Parks & Retention/ Public Facility & Institutional/etc	550.50	5.34	856.13	8.31	1,406.63	13.65	10.10
Right of Way					1,200.78	11.65	16.83
Totals					10,308.47	100.00	100.00



Employment Market Potential

Most of the employment opportunities within the SCA are related to schools, churches, retail, food service or home occupation. Significant employment opportunities are occurring a few miles to the north along the 202 Santan Freeway at Mercy Gilbert Hospital, the Santan Motorplex, Val Vista Square, SanTan Mall, the Chandler Airpark, ASU Polytechnic and the Phoenix Mesa Gateway Airport. The commute to these locations is less than 20 minutes.

Parks and Open Space

Public parks, trails and open spaces were the most requested land uses during the public open houses. The public acknowledged that there were private parks and open space within the master planned communities, but public facilities in South Gilbert were lacking. The only public recreation facility in South Gilbert is the Hetchler Soccer Complex at the far north boundary of the SCA. The East Maricopa Floodway and the surrounding Roosevelt Water Conservation District canal access roads are not open to the public as a trail system. The public noted access to the linear trails as a high priority. Another high priority was the construction of a regional park. The Town is currently working toward the acquisition of land for the regional park and hopes to bring forth a Capital Improvement Project in the near future. Intergovernmental Agreements are being discussed with other public and quasi-public entities.

Circulation and Infrastructure

Over time the farm roads were improved to two-way County roads. The County Roads in the northern half of the Santan Character Area have been improved to meet Town standards as part of Capital Improvement Projects or as part of new subdivision development. New subdivision development not contiguous with improved area continues to increase traffic on the County Roads in the south. The unimproved roads with increased traffic counts were a major issue raised by the SCA community. Capital Improvement Projects continue to fund roadway improvements.

Character Area Update Outline

Each year staff intends to update one of the General Plan Character Areas to keep them current. The Santan Character Area is the first to be modified. Below is a draft outline to use for each of the four character areas.

- 1) Introduction - Vision
 - a) Community Character
 - i) Character-defining features
- 2) Community
 - a) Design Principles - Sense of Place and Connections
 - b) Sustainability – Diverse Housing and Non-residential Uses
 - c) Environment – Neighborhoods, Public places and Infrastructure
- 3) Goals and Policies
 - a) Major Transportation Initiatives
 - b) New Development and Housing Diversity
 - c) Parks and Open Space/Trails
 - d) Community Image and Character
 - e) Community Core and Place making

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND INPUT

Staff continues to use social media to solicit ideas and feedback from the community. The latest news about the Santan Character Area Update was sent via email to interested parties in late

August. Since then, staff has received three more requests to be included in future email and news updates. No further public input has been received.

STAFF REQUEST

This report is provided for informational purposes.

Respectfully submitted,

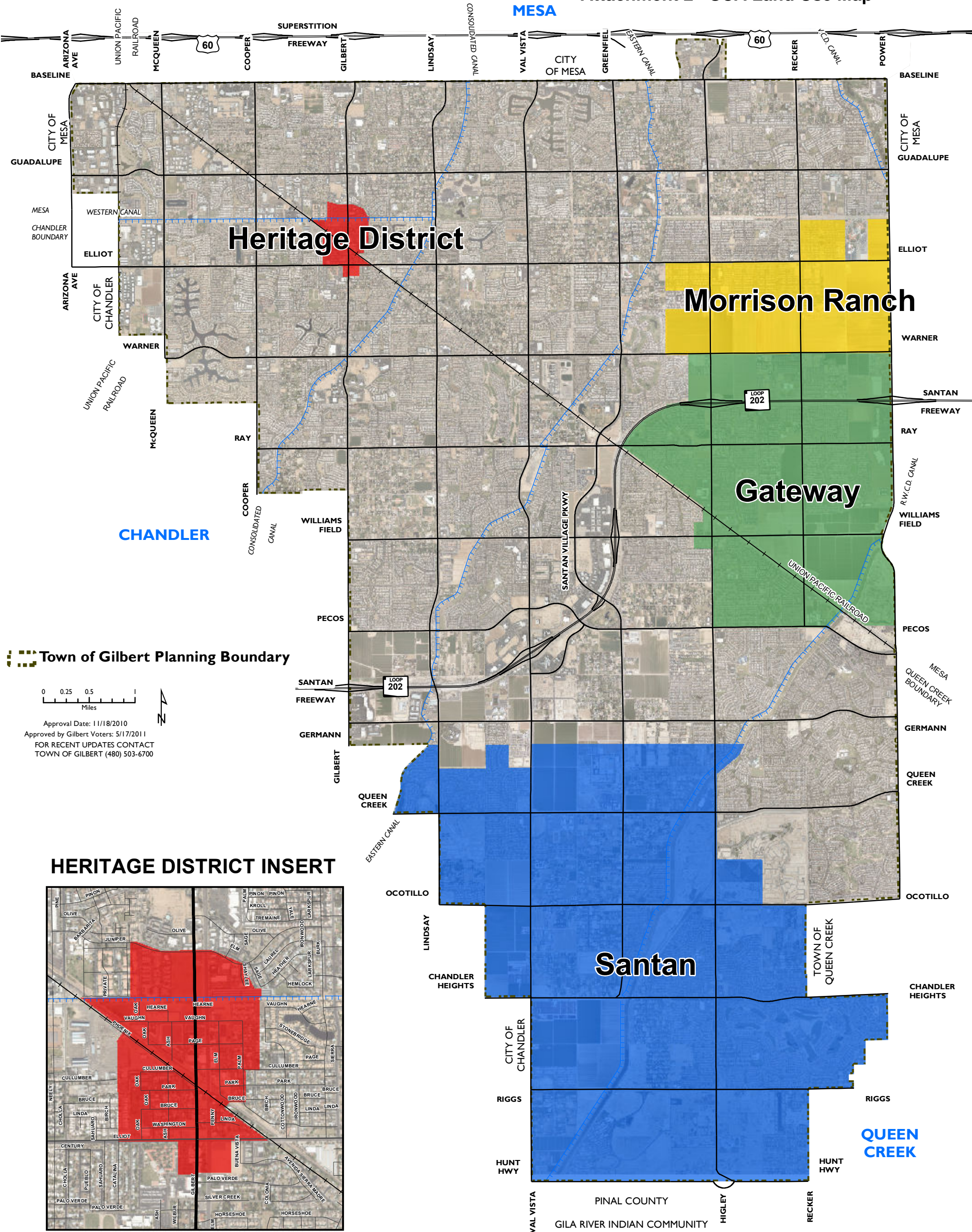
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Temes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Amy Temes
Senior Planner

Attachments:

Attachment 1	General Plan Character Areas
Attachment 2	SCA Boundary Map with Land Use Categories

GP14-02: Santan Character Area
General Plan Update
Attachment 2 - SCA Land Use Map



CHARACTER AREAS MAP

